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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0434
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 0361
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0218
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0232
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SUBJECT: DAS JOHN MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER ALKATIRI

REF: A) DILI 203 B) DILI 194

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1. (SBU) Summary: EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Eric John, along with Ambassador Rees and Emboff, met with Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri on May 3. DAS John congratulated Alkatiri on the many things that the Government of East Timor (GOET) is getting right, such as their work with the Millennium Challenge Account, the petroleum fund, and continued democratic development, but he stressed the importance of a level playing field for the 2007 elections and expressed the hope that current security challenges would soon be resolved. Referring to his decision to call in the armed forces (F-FDTL) to quell riots that broke out on April 28, Alkatiri stated that the situation had gotten out of control and that therefore he had no other option. He described the current situation as stabilized and said that soldiers still deployed around Dili would be sent back to their barracks within 24 hours. He also acknowledged the need to have a full and transparent accounting of what happened during the response to the riots, especially the need to address the rumors of up to 60 additional unreported deaths. DAS John also raised the issue of accountability for crimes committed in 1999. Alkatiri registered no objection to the U.S. position that the investigative unit of the Serious Crimes Unit (SCU) be re-established or to the need for a one-year extension for the Truth and Friendship Commission (TFC) to complete its work. End summary.

2. (U) During a meeting on May 3 with Prime Minister Alkatiri, DAS John began by congratulating the Prime Minister on the many things East Timor has gotten right: a fiscally responsible and transparent trust fund for petroleum revenues, selection as a Millennium Challenge Account eligible country, and a democratic system that the United States hopes will be a model for other countries in the region and the world.

3. (U) Turning to areas of concern, DAS John noted that East Timor's first post-independence national elections will take place in 2007 and indicated that the United States wants to provide technical support and to help ensure that the elections will be universally recognized as free and fair. In response, the Prime Minister noted that the election cycle will soon begin with the party congress of the ruling Fretilin Party, scheduled

for the end of May. He predicted that the Fretilin Congress will help to stabilize the nation. (Note: Fretilin leaders often equate stability and harmony within the party with stability and harmony within the nation.) The Prime Minister added that the Government would send a draft election law to Parliament later that same day. He said he hopes there will be hundreds of international observers at the election, and noted that the Government is working with the United Nations on international assistance for the elections, although the details have not been fixed. He agreed that the objective must be fair elections in which everyone has confidence. DAS John noted that a transparent election inspires confidence in all other aspects of the country's governance, and Alkatiri responded that "elections are just the starting point. Ultimately the government's legitimacy is in how it governs." He expressed the hope that governmental responsibilities could devolve over the next few years to local governments, but said that capacity building would be necessary before local government officials were ready for this responsibility.

14. (SBU) Turning to the recent civil disturbances and ongoing security situation, Prime Minister Alkatiri stated that he had had no option but to call in the F-FDTL to assist in quelling the riots that broke out on Friday afternoon (April 28). He stated that he had initially called in the Military Police to respond to the rioting at the Government compound "to save the building - otherwise it would have been burned down." He described the situation as then having worsened, particularly in the Tasitolu area, causing him to then call in regular F-FDTL personnel --- that is, combat troops rather than military police --- to control the situation and to get the rioters out of the area. DAS John noted the need to ensure clear roles for the respective security institutions, to which Alkatiri responded that the roles are already clear, but more training is needed to ensure the capacity of each to carry out their roles.

15. (SBU) Regarding how the riots got started and who was behind them, Alkatiri noted that elements of Colimau 2000 (see Ref B)

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were definitely involved. He said that as early as Tuesday, April 25, the non-petitioner demonstrators began splitting up into smaller groups that caused problems in various parts of Dili, leaving many fewer people at the main demonstration site. He stated that the plans for violence were made in advance and known to the petitioners, but that they had erroneously believed they could maintain control of the demonstration and keep it peaceful. Alkatiri reported telling the leader of the petitioners, Lieutenant Salsinha, "you have already lost control" during their meeting on Thursday, April 27, the day before the riot.

16. (SBU) Alkatiri expressed confidence that the current situation is stable, but observed that the challenge now is to fight rumors. This is much more difficult, he stated, as people are now scared and already prone to worry based on previous experiences of trauma. Immediately prior to the meeting with DAS John, Alkatiri had met with General Taur Matan Ruak. The Prime Minister said that they had agreed that all soldiers would withdraw from their current posts around the city perimeter and return to their barracks within 24 hours. In an indirect reference to his unhappiness with police handling of the riots, he said that he hoped the police would be able to maintain security.

17. (SBU) The Ambassador mentioned continuing reports that small squads of F-FDTL were going to the houses of petitioners and/or people suspected of having connections with them, seeking to arrest these people and/or harassing and intimidating their family members. The Prime Minister responded that General Matan Ruak had assured him that F-FDTL are no longer conducting operations of any kind in Dili. Rather, they are in fixed positions around the perimeter of the city and will soon be removed even from these positions.

18. (SBU) The Ambassador congratulated the Prime Minister on the

Government's announcement on May 2 of a commission to investigate deaths and injuries that had occurred over the weekend. He noted that Arsenio Bano, the Minister of Labor who will co-chair the commission, will have credibility among Timorese and internationals. The Ambassador also commended the Prime Minister for the commission's reported decision to accept the assistance of human rights experts from the United Nations Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL) and stressed the importance of a credible investigation. The Prime Minister also noted that the Provedor (Ombudsman) is also doing a parallel investigation, and agreed that "the people must know the truth." Alkatiri said he still believes that the maximum number of dead will not exceed 6 or 7 people.

¶9. (U) DAS John also congratulated the Prime Minister on East Timor's good relations with its neighbors, Australia and Indonesia. He noted that good relations with Indonesia are important to the United States and that he knows a good bilateral relationship with Indonesia is also extremely important to East Timor. Noting that the impressive progress toward reform in the Indonesian government, including the military, must include accountability for serious crimes committed in the past, he stated that the United States would like to revive the investigate unit of the SCU to complete the remaining investigations into serious crimes committed in East Timor in 1999, and also to extend the mandate of the TFC by one year. DAS John noted that it was important for the SCU to complete its investigations in part because this would enable the TFC to make a complete assessment of all the serious crimes within its mandate. Prime Minister Alkatiri stated that East Timor had no objection to this plan and would welcome the completion of the investigative record, but that the challenge will be to get acceptance by the Government of Indonesia. He noted that East Timor is not in a position to pressure the Government of Indonesia on this count and must depend on other nations to be the primary interlocutors on these issues. DAS John added that the United States wants the TFC to name the names of perpetrators and to have international participation in its processes. He added that the United States will keep pushing for a credible outcome, but that it is important to know that GOET is in agreement.

¶10. (U) DAS John did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.
REES